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ABSTRACT

In the context of generating research on student-generated goals, this paper asks: (1) whether Japanese students studying in Japan can articulate their own learning goals for a university level, general conversation course; and (2) what procedures are helpful in student goal setting. Subjects were 50 second year Japanese English conversation students in Japan; 10 male high school exchange students (aged 17-18 years) from Canada served as a comparison group. Two goal exercises were administered to subjects. Data show that prior to instruction, most Japanese students have some understanding of what goals and objectives are and how they function, that a small minority of students have no idea of goals and objectives, and that the Japanese students find the idea of goal setting for class ·w and difficult. It is helpful to the goal-setting process if students are encouraged to formulate specific, rather than vague, goals. (Contains 3 references.) (JP)

Student Generated Goals: A Pilot Project

Dale T. Griffee

It is generally agreed that goals are essential for any language program. Kroehler (1993, p. 18) sets forth this position by saying, "A common set of goals and objectives for our language program will certainly improve the program and increase student proficiency." It is not, however, commonly agreed that student generated goals are essential for the successful functioning of a language program. Kroehler (1993, p. 18) notes this when he adds, "However, the greatest gains will come only when the students accept such goals and objectives as their own." The purpose of this paper is to investigate whether students can generate their own learning goals.

Gorsuch (1991b) lists seven areas in which student originated goals (SOGO) and objectives could be of positive value for a language program: 1) They can focus student's attention on the way they learn, 2) they can focus students attention on specific skill areas, 3) they can shift responsibility for learning from the teacher to the student, 4) they can give students a sense of control and accomplishment, 5) they can focus students' attention on how they behave in class, 6) they can focus students on learning resources outside the classroom and 7) they can give the teacher a window on student thinking which may lead to the teacher having insights on curriculum and student learning.

Although SOGO are relevant to the areas listed above, an ERIC search covering 1982 to 1992 revealed no entries under student generated goals. Gorsuch (1991a) discusses an index card activity for creating student goals, but her paper contains no references. Given the paucity of published research on the subject of student generated goals, this paper breaks new ground. Two initial questions guide this paper. The first is, can Japanese students studying in Japan articulate their own learning goals for a university level, general conversation

course? The second question is, what steps and procedures are helpful or necessary in student goal setting?

Method

Subjects

The primary subjects for this study were 50 second year Japanese English conversation students in the Obei Bunka Gakka (Division of Euro–American Studies) of Seigakuin University, Saitama, Japan. The students were in two classes one of which met on Tuesday and the other which met on Thursday. Each class met once a week for ninety minutes. The Tuesday class had 25 students consisting of 11 women and 14 men and the Thursday class had 25 students consisting of 12 women and 13 men. The students ranged in age from 19 to 21 years of age. They were all Japanese and all students except two were from Saitama and the nearby Tokyo area.

During the same period as this experiment a group of 10 male high school students aged 17 and 18 from British Columbia (BC), Canada arrived on campus as exchange students for the purpose of Japanese language and culture study. During an orientation session two exercises (see below) were administered. This provided a chance to compare the results of the Japanese students with a group of native speakers of approximately the same age.

Materials

Two goal exercises were used in this experiment based on Gorsuch (1991b). The exercises were administered to both university classes as well as the British Columbia (BC) students during an eight week period in May and June, 1993. Exercise one introduced students to the concept of goals and objectives. Exercise two refined the concept, gave an example and asked students to revise their goal. Both university classes used a conversation textbook not related to goal formation.

Analysis

The two exercises consisted of the following questions. Exercise one was 1. What is the difference between a goal and an objective? 2. Is getting an "A" in this course a goal or an objective? 3. Is graduating from Seigakuin a goal or an objective? 4. What is your goal for this year in this class? 5. Was question four easy or difficult for you? Exercise two asked students to revise their goals.

Results

Table 1.

What is the difference between a goal and an objective?

British Columbia students	replies
A goal is the final aim and objectives are part of the goal.	4
A goal is your aim and an objective is the reason for the goal.	1
A goal has to be done while an objective is what one want to do.	1
You have to work hard to do a goal, but not for an objective.	1
Goals are set by yourself, but objectives are set by others.	1
A goal is what one deserves, objectives are what makes them useful.	1
Goals--what one wants to do, objectives-- what one actually does	1
Totals	10
Japanese University students.	
A goal is the final aim, the objective is the purpose.	12
A goal is the final aim, the objective is part of the goal.	5
Don't know or can't explain in English.	4
Misunderstanding or incomprehensible answer	4
Objectives are more concrete than goals	3
A goal is greater than an objective and needs more effort.	2
Goals are an activity whereas objectives are not an activity.	1

Goals can be done anytime, objectives can be done only once.	1
Goals mean effort, objectives means no effort	1
Goals are future, objectives are now.	1
Totals	34

Question one of Exercise One about the difference between a goal and an objective (see Table 1) was included to ascertain the degree of clarity students had about goal setting prior to this study. The BC students seem to have a clear understanding that goals and objectives are somehow different, but there is no agreement on what the difference is. The Japanese students also evidence general clarity with at least half of the 34 respondents indicating some degree of understanding.

Table 2.

Is making an "A" a goal or an objective?

British Columbia students	goal 8 objective 0
Japanese University students	goal 14 objective 18

Table 3.

Is graduating a goal or an objective?

British Columbia students	goal 1 objective 9
Japanese University students	goal 11 objective 23

In considering whether making an "A" in a course is a goal or an objective (see Table 2) the BC students believe it to be a goal while the Japanese students tend to see it as an objective. In considering whether graduation is a goal or an objective (see Table 3) the BC students and the Japanese students converge in their thinking that graduation is more an objective than a goal. We may conclude that the Japanese students seem at least as clear (or unclear) on the relationship of goals and objectives as the native speaker BC students.

Table 4.

What is your goal for this class?

British Columbia students	
Speak or communicate in Japanese.	7
Understand Japanese culture.	1
Learn more for a future job.	1
Become a unique person.	1
Totals	10
Japanese University students.	
Pass this course or make a high grade.	13
Speak or communicate more in English.	12
Increase my listening ability.	3
Never be absent.	3
Concentrate on this class and make an effort.	2
Enjoy this class.	2
Finish this term.	1
Prepare for travel abroad.	1
To know my goal.	1
No answer.	1
Totals	39

Table 5.

Where these questions easy or difficult for you?

British Columbia students	Easy 4 Difficult 4
Japanese University students	Easy 3 Difficult 35

Note. One BC student did not answer and one BC student checked both answers.

When asked how easy or difficult setting goals was (see Table 5), the BC students were divided equally at four students saying the exercise was easy and four saying the exercise was difficult. Of the 38 Japanese students who answered

the question, 35 said it was hard and several students wrote that it was very hard. One student went so far as to draw a picture of herself crying. From this we can conclude that goal setting is difficult and probably new to most of the Japanese students.

Table 6.

What is your revised goal?

British Columbia students.	
Increase vocabulary, speak and communicate in Japanese.	8
Play basketball in Japan.	1
Become a unique person.	1
Totals	10
Japanese University students.	
Get an A in this course.	20
Increase vocabulary, speak more fluently.	15
Increase hearing, listening comprehension.	10
Watch satellite TV	1
Try to like this class.	1
Attend this class all year.	1
Totals	48

Discussion

The first question this paper addresses is can Japanese students create their own learning goals. The answer is a guarded but clear yes. From this pilot data we can conclude that prior to instruction most Japanese students have some understanding of what goals and objectives are and how they function, that a small minority of students have absolutely no idea of what goals and objective are and that the Japanese students find the idea of goal setting for a class new, difficult and

even painful.

The second question is what steps and procedures are helpful or necessary for the Japanese students to set their own goals. When students initially write their goals they do three things. First, they tend to write generalized goals rather than specific goals e.g. I want to be fluent in English. Second, they want unrealistic perfection e.g. never be absent and third, they are not specific e.g. I want to learn a lot of words. Exercise Two which asks students to revise their goals took more than one class period to accomplish and it is doubtful these exercises could have been completed if the students had had to work alone, unaided by the teacher, for example if the exercise had been assigned as homework. In both cases it took 30 to 40 minutes in several class periods to complete the exercises. In this project, the teacher accepted any answer and did not attempt to tell students specifically how to formulate their goals. What the teacher did do, however, was to push students to be concrete and specific. A typical response to students from the teacher was, "yes, I understand that you want improve your hearing, but how will you know when that happens?" If a student wrote that they wanted to improve their speaking ability, they were asked how many times they would speak each class. The teacher recorded in his log notes that these negotiations on goal revision were the first authentic conversation he had had with his students all semester.

Conclusion

This pilot study was exploratory in nature and raised several issues for future research. For example, the total replies for exercise number one from the Japanese students were less than the total number of students because several students did not complete their assignment. Perhaps there will always be students in university classrooms who do not hand in assignments, but more rigorous accountability could be implemented. Additional questions for future consideration

include, How could students evaluate their goals? How do student goals differ from teacher goals and institutional goals? Finally, How do student goals, student learning styles and strategies complement each other? A follow up study beginning April 1994 is planned to illuminate these questions.

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